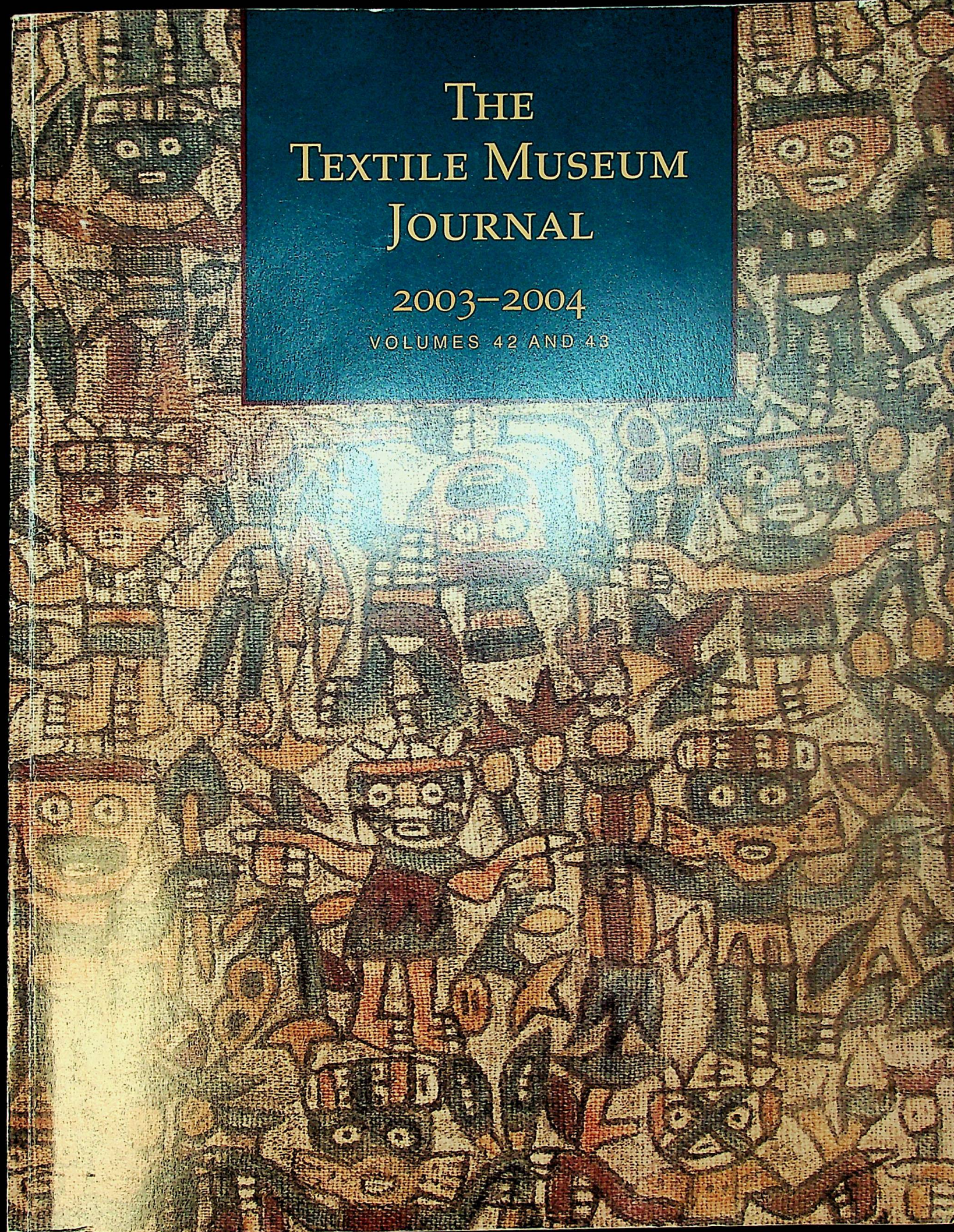


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2003-2004

VOLUMES 42 AND 43



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Front and back covers: Skirt panel from a woman's dress (detail, warp direction horizontal), overall size: 82 x 158.5 cm. The Textile Museum 1964.31.2, museum purchase. See Mary Frame, *What the Women Were Wearing: A Deposit of Early Nasca Dresses and Shawls from Cahuachi, Peru*, pp. 13–53, fig. 24.

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THE TEXTILE MUSEUM

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Fig. 1. Embroidering a blouse.
Señora Enma María Calchaco,
caserío Guanupamba, Mariano
Acosta, eastern Imbabura
province. Photograph by
Marilee Schmit Nason, 1984.

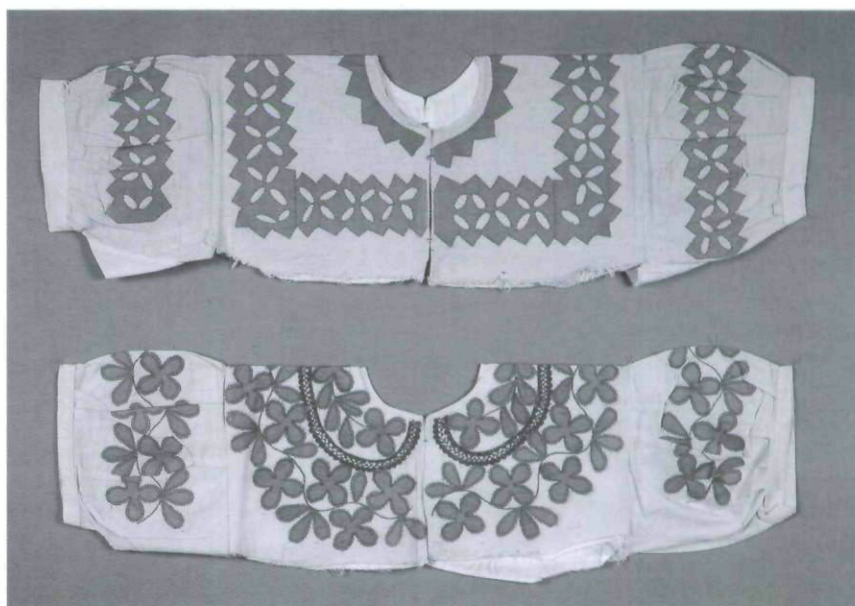


Fig. 2. Two bodices made in 1984 in the *camisa picada* style, commissioned by the author. Plain-weave cotton fabric (muslin) with red appliqué designs, with additional red cotton embroidery on the lower blouse. The gussets have been folded under. Above: *siquiminiqui* design. Edges of the appliqué fabric turned under and overcast. 26 x 85 cm (10 1/4 x 33 1/2 in.) as shown. Below: *tawri fanga* design. Edges of the appliqué fabric raw with spaced buttonhole stitches. 25 x 83 cm. (9 3/4 x 32 1/2 in.) as shown. Mariano Acosta, eastern Imbabura province. Collection of Marilee Schmit Nason.

Blouse Making in Mariano Acosta, Ecuador

Marilee Schmit Nason

The embroidered blouse is the most important identifying feature of women's costume of the northeastern Pichincha-eastern Imbabura area.¹ These blouses also have the finest and most elaborate embroidery of any made in modern Ecuador, and within this area the embroidery of Mariano Acosta in eastern Imbabura province (map 2) has become the most finely detailed (fig. 1).² These blouses are made using traditional Spanish tailoring and embroidery techniques, although the design evolution is indigenous.

The blouses are of white cotton or synthetic fabric, embroidered on the yoke and upper sleeves. The older style has separate collar pieces, while newer examples often have a collar-like design in the same area. Contrasting colors of embroidery are normally used for the collar (or collar area) and the yoke. The designs are symmetrical around the center front and back seams and over the shoulders. The sleeves have long ruffles, pleated into the cuff of the upper portion, with lace trim on the lower edge. The body of the blouse normally extends to the knees and serves as a slip under the skirt.

The embroidery of blouses is considered women's work and, indeed, the best indicator of a woman's domestic ability. Most women are able to do all phases of blouse making: drawing the design, embroidering, sewing the blouse together. When a woman is inept at embroidery and has no female relatives to do it for her, other strategies are employed. The usual solution is to commission a complete blouse from another woman in the village or to have others undertake the manufacture of specific portions; in some cases a man will embroider his wife's blouse. Ironically, a woman who is unable to embroider is considered *karishina* (Q., manlike), but no deprecatory term is applied, nor stigma attached, to men who undertake the task.

Within most families there is some specialization in the different phases of blouse making.

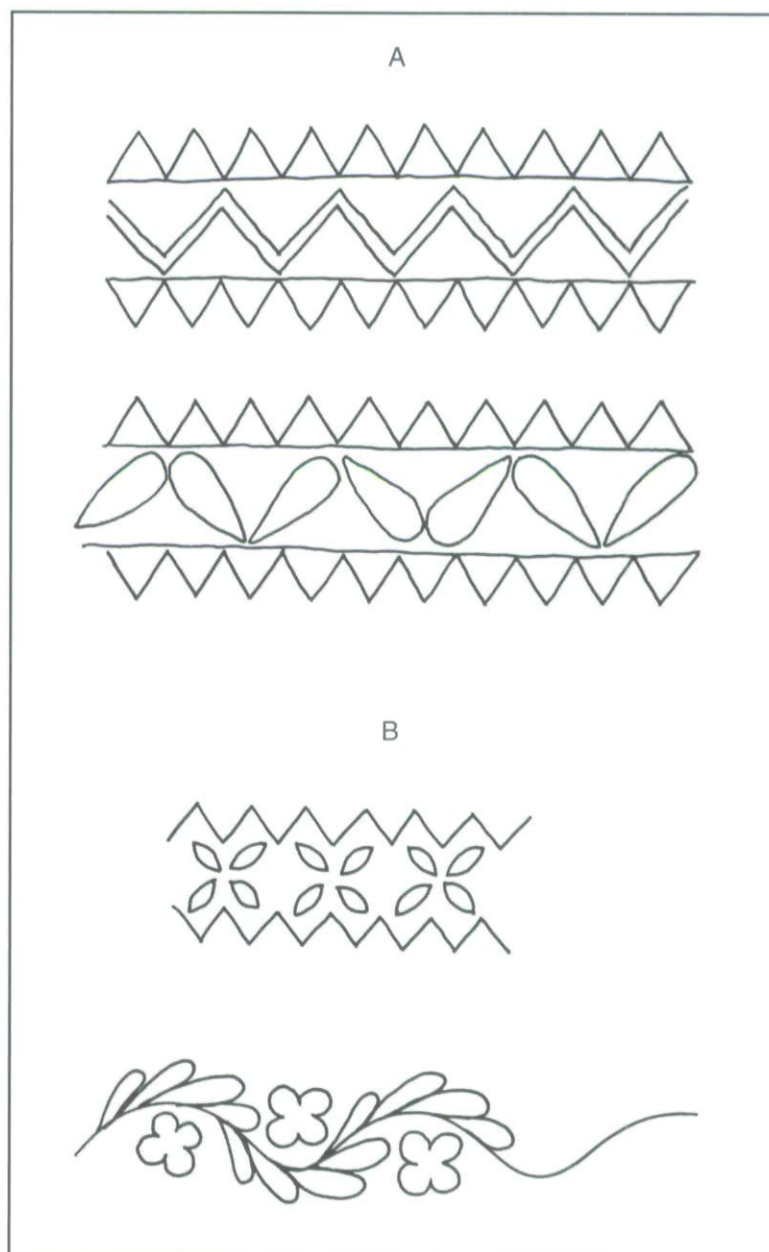


Fig. 3. Designs used for the *camisa picada*. Top to bottom: *quingos* (Q., zigzags), *pata de vaca* (S., cow's hoof), *tiquiminiqui* (Q., flank to flank; *trasero con trasero* S.), and *tawri fanga* (Q., lupine leaf). The top two drawings are by Louise O'Sullivan based on sketches by Mariana Hinojosa, who was born and raised in La Esperanza. She learned to make *camisas picadas* from her grandmother. The bottom two drawings are by Marilee Schmit Nason.

Women share responsibilities with their female relatives according to their specific talents. There is also a village-level specialization, and women who are especially adept in a given phase will design, embroider, or sew blouses for a fee payable in goods, services, or money.

Older blouses were made with homespun cottons (*lienzo* and *liencillo* S.) woven at home or purchased as yard goods in Ibarra, Otavalo, or locally; or they were made from cotton flour sacks. Until the 1940s, a style of blouse called *camisa picada* (S., pieced-together blouse) with appliqué designs was made and worn (fig. 2). The appliqué was done with coarse red or blue fabric. People in the village say that only four designs were used (fig. 3). It appears that the later embroidered designs derive primarily from only one of these, *tawri fanga*.

Currently, machine-made fabrics are used. The cloth types include *canciller* (S., a heavy poly-cotton sheeting); *tela de seda* (S., silk cloth), also called *caucho* (S., rubber), which is a silky and slippery nylon fabric; *sintéticos* (S., synthetics), which include both *grambino* and *dacrón* (S., mid-

weight polyester cloths); and *opal* or *lienzo* (S., heavier-weight cottons used for facings). These fabrics are mostly of Ecuadorian and Colombian manufacture.

One meter (39 inches) of cloth is sufficient for the pieces required for the bodices of two blouses (fig. 4). The hand of the person who will wear the blouse is used to determine the dimension of the pieces. First the size of the sleeves (*mangas* S.) is determined: one *cuarta* (S., handspan) high, and three *cuartas* wide. The yoke (*hombreira* S.) and collar (*solapa* S.) pieces are cut from the remaining fabric.

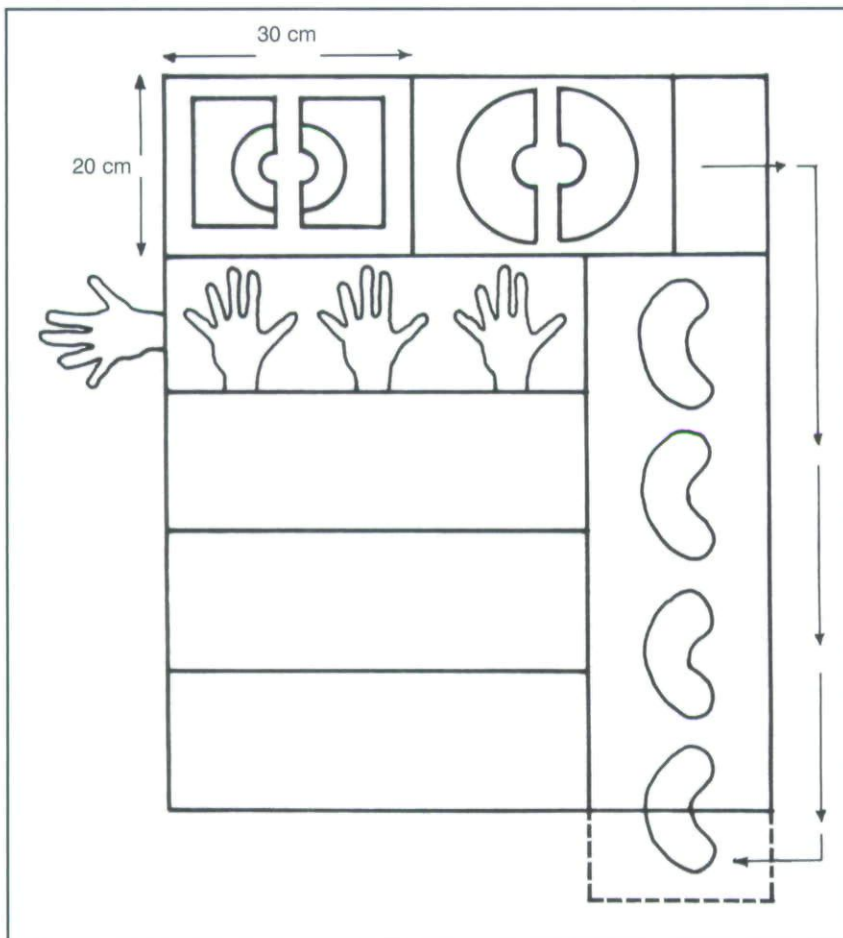
The yoke has a lining, and the collar may also, generally cut from a different fabric. The body of the blouse is usually a third fabric, for which 1.5 to 2 meters (59–79 inches) of fabric are required. The body should be one *vara* (ca. 84 centimeters or 33 inches) long if it will be used with a *centro* (S., pleated skirt), or a meter (39 inches) long if worn with an *anaku* (Q., wrapped skirt). Gussets and cuffs generally are made of the same fabric as the body of the blouse, although ruffles and lace edgings are often of lighter-weight materials.

After the yoke is cut out, the embroidery design is drawn on the fabric with either ballpoint pen or pencil. The former is easier to follow when embroidering, although the latter washes out better once the embroidery is complete. The drawing process is facilitated by stretching the cloth tightly over a small wood plank used as a drawing table. The drawing specialist holds the plank on her lap and works on one area at a time.

There are a number of design specialists in Mariano Acosta. These women, and many who are not specialists, keep design drawings on paper for reference. In general, the designs are of the sleeve elements. A woman who contracts to have a blouse design drawn for her can consult the drawing specialist's notebook and choose the design she prefers or indicate design elements she would like integrated into her blouse. A drawing specialist can also invent a design based on the taste and preference of the person requesting a design. Some drawing specialists draw designs from memory. Those who can *cuadrar en la mente* (S.) are held in high esteem for this ability.

The designs are classified according to whether they are the narrower and more complex style (*jantsi* Q.; *complejo*, *tupido*, *menudo*, or *fino* S.; fig. 5) or the wider style (fig. 6) with less complex motifs (*llambu* Q.; *ordinario*, *ancho*, *de hoja*,

Fig. 4. Layout of blouse pieces to be cut. Mariano Acosta, eastern Imbabura province. Drawing by Louise O'Sullivan based on a diagram by Marilee Schmit Nason.



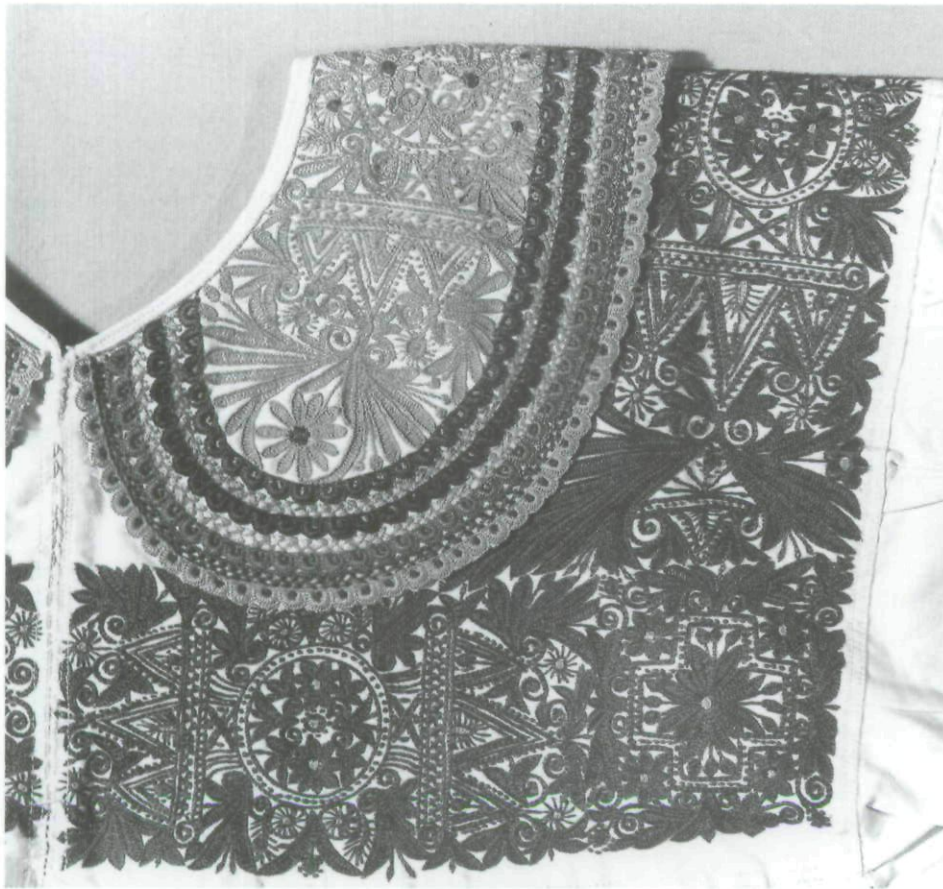


Fig. 5. Detail of a blouse embroidered in the closed double chain stitch with a fine design, *parque con iglesia y pila* (S., park with church and stone fountain). Plain-weave cotton fabric embroidered with cotton thread, orange on the collar and green below. Señora Rosa de Juma, caserío Puetaquí, Mariano Acosta, eastern Imbabura province. Collection of Marilee Schmit Nason, purchased 1981.



Fig. 6. Detail of an unfinished blouse embroidered in self-couching with a wide design. Twill-weave synthetic fabric embroidered with cotton thread, turquoise on the collar and dark pink below. Caserío La Florida, Mariano Acosta, eastern Imbabura province. Collection of Marilee Schmit Nason, purchased 1981.

or *de hojita* S.). The former style, requiring more skill and considered more impressive, has become the style most characteristic of the village. Older designs of primarily floral derivation continue to be produced, but innovation is ongoing, and many new motifs have been introduced.

Machine-made and dyed threads are used for the embroidery. Previously, all blouses were embroidered with cotton embroidery floss; more recently, some have been worked with acrylic threads. For machine embroidery, rayon or polyester threads are often used. In the 1980s, threads imported from France (DMC Perlé) were favored because of their quality and colorfastness. Now this thread is made under license in Colombia; other threads imported from Brazil and the United States as well as Ecuadorian threads are also used. Finer threads are used for the finer fabrics, and heavier threads for the heavier fabrics.

Most women who do hand embroidery control the tension of the cloth by anchoring one end of the cloth against the thigh with the stitching hand and pulling the other, loose end, with the second hand (fig.1). Alternatively, many women, when seated on the floor, tuck the end of the cloth behind the knee of a bent leg, creating a taut surface by pulling on the loose end. An embroidery hoop (*tambor* or *aro* S.) is used mainly in machine embroidery. A woman usually sits on a mat or cloth and covers her lap with a cloth in order to keep her work clean.

Knots are not used either to begin or to finish an embroidery thread. Rather, embroidery is begun by darning the thread parallel to the weft of the ground fabric on the right side for several stitches, about one-half to one centimeter ($\frac{3}{16}$ – $\frac{3}{8}$

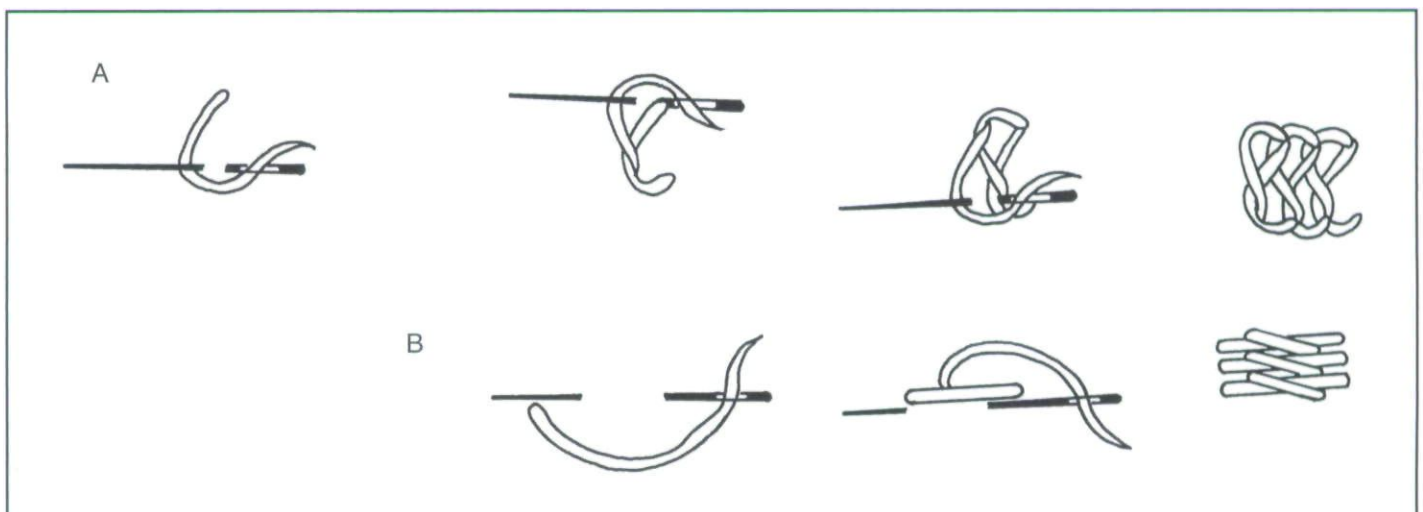
inch). The tail of the thread is caught by the first real stitch, thus securing it. Embroidery is similarly finished by darning the thread parallel to the weft on the reverse side of the fabric.

When the end of a length of thread is reached but there is still more to embroider in that color, no knot is made. The old thread is joined with a new piece in one of two ways: either a small loop is made at the end of the piece in use and drawn around the end of the new length; or the fibers of both the thread in use and the new thread are opened and twisted together.

The embroidery is done primarily in one of two stitches (fig. 7). One is a closed double chain stitch that creates a ridge around the edge of the design element (figs. 5 and 7A), and the other is a self-couching stitch that forms a smooth surface (figs. 6 and 7B).³ In Mariano Acosta, the self-couching stitch is called *puntada recta* (S., straight stitch), *larga* (S., long) or *ordinaria* (S., plain) while the closed double chain stitch is called *puntada limeña* (S., Lima stitch), *embozalada* (S., muzzled),⁴ or *cadena* (S., chain). The closed double chain stitch is preferred for the narrow designs most characteristic of the village, while the self-couching stitch is normally used for the wide designs.

Machine embroidery, done on treadle sewing machines, resembles the effect of the self-couching stitch. Despite this fact, more delicate drawings are considered especially apt for machine embroidery and the wide leaf designs are deemed less suitable. The self-couching stitch is faster, and thus preferred for embroidery done for sale, while the closed double chain stitch is considered more elegant. The closed double

Fig. 7. Stitches used in eastern Imbabura embroidery: A. Double chain stitch. B. Self-couching. The double chain stitch is shown slightly open so that it is easier to read. Drawings by Kathleen Epstein based on sketches by Ann Pollard Rowe.



chain stitch wastes no thread on the back of the fabric, while in self-couching, the stitches on the back are longer. Other stitches are used to fill in details, including buttonhole stitch (for the scallops along the edges of the collars), outline stitch and simple chain stitch (for lines), herringbone stitch, and French knots (for dots).

Although the time it takes to embroider a blouse varies greatly according to the fineness of the design and the fabric, the stitch chosen, and the amount of other work a woman has to do, a skilled woman is able to embroider a blouse in one to three weeks.

After all the individual parts have been embroidered, they are sewn together to form the bodice, which is then lined (fig. 8). Gussets are added to the lower portion of the bodice, and the upper and lower parts are joined. Then the sleeve ruffles and other decorations such as ribbons are added. Seams are flat felled; there are no exposed raw edges of fabric on the inside of the blouse. This phase of the production is often carried out by mestizos-whites (the "*blancos de la plaza*") who are more likely to own the expensive treadle sewing machines used for the purpose.

Notes

1. See Rowe ed. 1998, chapter 5.
2. Data were collected during ten months residence in Mariano Acosta in five field seasons between July 1981 and June 1987. Funding was provided by the Tinker Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the Organization of American States. See also Schmit 1991 and the section on Mariano Acosta by Marilee Schmit Nason in Rowe ed. 1998, pp. 103–9.
3. The stitch analysis in this sentence is by Ann Pollard Rowe.
4. The term *bozal* compares this stitch, which crosses over itself, to a halter (e.g., for a horse) made of a single length of rope wrapped around itself (cf. Tobar 1961, pp. 49–50).



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Fig. 8. Sewing together a blouse with a treadle sewing machine. Señora Rosa de Juma, caserío Puetaquí, Mariano Acosta, eastern Imbabura province. Photograph by Marilee Schmit Nason, 1981.

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